

HUMAN EVENTS
9 February, 1985

Won't Involve Covert Aid

Lugar Has Ideas to Pressure Sandinistas

Is crucial aid to the anti-Sandinistas or the Contras dead? That's the fear of many foreign policy experts, many of them within the Administration. The President has stressed he wants the aid to keep going. But Sen. David Durenberger (D.-Minn.), the new chairman of the Senate intelligence panel, has stressed he no longer backs "covert" assistance and is ambiguous about "overt" assistance as well.

Even more surprising, Sen. Richard Lugar (R.-Ind.), the new chairman of the Foreign Relations panel, recently told the National Press Club: "Aid to the Contras is not viable because it is no longer covert and because the Congress will probably not continue to fund it."

When we talked to Lugar last week, however, the Indianan said he had explored alternative plans with the Administration that would not involve "covert" assistance, but were still designed to put "substantial pressure" upon the Sandinistas. He said he didn't want to surface these ideas at this time, but said they would probably be made known within the next month.

Lugar stressed he would continue to push for aid to the Contras if he thought it could pass, and insisted it would be wrong to just cut them loose.

"I think it is important," he stressed, "that we have confidence and credibility with our friends in Central America, that we do not abandon them. And I feel that very strongly. So we cannot leave any ambiguity there at all that suddenly we are simply going to leave them, and hope that somehow it will all work out."

But the covert Contra program doesn't seem doable at this point, he insisted. The Administration, he stressed, "has relied upon a strategy of asking

the two intelligence committees to authorize \$14 million for the Contras... but I'm not able to count the votes in either of these two committees and haven't been able to for awhile.

"We used to be able to count them in the Senate Committee — nine out of 15 of us who used to be on that committee are gone. I think it has changed. The Administration, which relied upon getting a favorable vote out of these two committees, is going to be disappointed.

"What this means is that the Administration must formulate new methods of putting pressure on Nicaragua, and I would like to be cooperative in that process, and have been.... And I'm convinced there are ways of doing this. I'm convinced further that they must be done."

Has he given any tactical or strategic advice to the Administration? "I've suggested," he said, "that as opposed to making a proposal to the two intelligence committees and having the potential of losing twice and then trying to pick up the pieces, perhaps the better course is to think about a successful initiative of bringing substantial pressure on the Sandinistas so our negotiations might have some hope of success, and to perhaps do so with the Foreign Relations Committee as the committee of jurisdiction. And I've indicated to Secretary [of State George] Shultz that I would work with him on such an initiative if he and the President feel it is appropriate."

Whether Lugar's ideas will prevail are not certain, but, however things are worked out, should the Congress fail to embrace a program that will assist the Contras and bring heavy pressures to bear upon the Sandinistas, Central America almost certainly will be lost.

Columnist Pat Buchanan recently outlined what those consequences would be:

"What the war for Nicaragua has become, then, is a battle between anti-Communists and democrats in the hills supported by the United States, and a Marxist-Leninist revolutionary regime in Managua, supported by the Soviet Union, Cuba, Libya, East Germany and Iran.

"In some ways, the audacity of the Soviet Union has to be admired. Post-Grenada, surely some foreign policy specialists must have warned the Politburo that there was nothing Moscow could do, at such a distance, to prevent America's liquidation of the beachhead in North America; that it was probably unwise to invest Soviet prestige; that a Soviet arms buildup would only give Washington an excuse; that the Sandinistas should probably cut a deal.

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"But Moscow gambled. Directly in the wake of the Reagan landslide, they rushed into Corinto helicopter gunships which could tip the balance decisively against the guerrillas supported by the United States. Moscow had seen the American investment, and carefully raised the bet. Not only has Washington not responded, Congress is ready to throw in the American hand.

"If the Contras are abandoned, Honduras will then become host to a deserted, embittered army of some 15,000 and Honduras will move to the top of the enemies list of a victorious Managua anxious to settle accounts with the neighbor that gave sanctuary to its enemies. As for Costa Rica, democratic and disarmed, sandwiched between Nicaragua and Panama, the governing elite should watch the vote carefully, and if it goes as expected, begin checking out the real estate in Miami.

"Already, a hopeful new strategy of wooing Nicaragua is being chatted up. Since America is so wealthy and near, it is argued, and the Soviet Union so backward and distant, eventually Managua's rulers will see that their only hope of progress lies in association with the United States. So it was said of Cuba. . . .

"If the Contras are abandoned, Reagan will be left with this stark choice: either adjust to the permanent existence of a Russian military beach-head and revolutionary base camp on the North American continent — or send in the Marines."